



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF CHICAGO



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 11, 2016

CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

press@cityofchicago.org

CITY TAKES ACTION ON DELINQUENT BUSINESSES TO STOP UNLAWFUL TOBACCO SALES

Tobacco Enforcement Units Conducting Raids across the City to Ensure Safe and Lawful Business Practice Across All Neighborhoods

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today announced the results of recent investigations into illegal tobacco sales in Chicago, following an expansion to the City's enforcement units to more aggressively intervene in businesses selling tobacco products illegally. In the last few weeks alone, City tobacco enforcement units have uncovered 192 violations, resulting in the seizure of 797 packs of unstamped cigarettes from delinquent businesses. The 136 investigations and subsequent actions announced today are a direct result of the expansion of the Mayor's tobacco enforcement units.

"Enforcement of legal tobacco sales in our city will not only help keep our neighborhoods safer, but will prevent unlawful and harmful tobacco products from falling into the hands of our children," said Mayor Emanuel. "By cracking down on businesses for illegally selling products, our goal is to avoid black market activity that is plaguing some of our neighborhoods, and to help our youth develop healthy lifestyles."

The Tobacco Unit—a joint partnership between the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) and the Chicago Police Department (CPD)—was developed to enforce illegal tobacco sales and crack down on all illegal tobacco activity. By working closely with CPD Vice and the Bureau of Patrol, BACP is able to make a stronger case to cripple problem business activity.

Since actions were taken to double down on enforcement last month, including the implementation of a new unit on February 10th, the Tobacco Unit conducted 136 illegal tobacco sales investigations which resulted in:

- 51 businesses found in violation
- 192 tobacco tickets (23 tickets for unstamped cigarettes, 12 tickets for single cigarettes and 157 tickets for various tobacco related violations)
- 797 packs of unstamped cigarettes confiscated

"Our investigators are familiar with the problems establishments that often hide contraband. By adding the additional teams to scour the streets and business for this harmful and illegal activity, this will hopefully deter this type of behavior as it not only hurts the community but also hurts responsible business," said BACP Commissioner Maria Guerra Lapacek.

During this same time period, investigators followed up on a resident complaint into sales of unstamped and single cigarettes in the 3rd Ward. With the assistance of CPD, investigators found 172 packs of unstamped cigarettes and 20 single cigarettes (a.k.a. "loosies") for sale, which resulted in 12 citations.

"Illegal tobacco sales are a major funding source of street gangs," said CPD Chief of Patrol, Eddie Johnson. "By enforcing the legal sale of tobacco we're using another tool in our arsenal to keep Chicago's neighborhoods safer."

The enhanced Tobacco Unit has also begun focusing its efforts into cases identified by a recent uptick in 311 calls and target businesses in areas where repeat offenders are more likely to illegally sell. For repeat offenders, investigators are able to revoke licensure, and/or impart a one-year tobacco sales ban on the location and business owner in violation. In the past year alone, BACP has revoked 38 tobacco licenses due to violations.

BACP and CPD have begun working with aldermen to address complaints about loose tobacco sales both on the streets and at businesses.

In addition to providing aldermen with regular reports about unlawful tobacco activity in their wards, a new subcommittee will also review existing City protocol on loose tobacco sales and identify opportunities for improvement. These investments in enforcement and to deter illegal tobacco activity are being supported in part by revenue generated by other tobacco products tax.

BACP enforces and writes violations for both the Cook County and City of Chicago Codes relating to unstamped cigarette sales. The fine for unstamped cigarette sales was increased from \$1,000 to \$2,000 for 1-40 packs of, plus \$50 per pack for 41 or more packs.

"Increasing violation for offenses is an important deterrent for repeat offenders on breaking the law as this hits their pocket book," added Commissioner Guerra Lapacek.

In addition to laying the groundwork for better coordination and enforcement efforts citywide to crack down on illegal tobacco sales, the tobacco prevention ordinance also seeks to increase penalties by classifying repeat offenses of illegal tobacco sales as a criminal penalty for up to six months imprisonment.

Following the introduction of the tobacco prevention ordinance this year, the Emanuel Administration worked closely with aldermen to strengthen the ordinance and to combat illegal tobacco sales. City Council is expected to vote on the ordinance at its March 2016 meeting.

#

More about the BACP and the Citywide Tobacco Unit:

BACP licenses the sale of tobacco products in Chicago, and is the lead agency for helping businesses and residents to understand new and existing regulations for tobacco sales.

The Citywide Tobacco Unit, a collaboration between BACP and CPD, investigates violations of Tobacco Sale to Minor, Selling Individual Cigarettes, also known as 'singles and loosies,' Unlawful Concealment,

Retail Recordkeeping Requirement, Inspection Interference, and Failure to Display Tobacco to Minors Warning Sign. To report the sale of unstamped cigarettes, call 311 or visit www.CheckTheStamps.org.